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‘Red’ Nations: Marxists and the Radical Native American Sovereignty Movement of the Late Cold War

Abstract

This article constructs a history of the mutual personal engagement of Native American sovereignty activists and Marxist entities in the 1970s and 1980s. Native American diplomacy attempted to reconfigure the geography of American Indian sovereignty into a fully independent Native America in alliance with revolutionary Marxism and its 'red' nations around the globe. Marxist-Native solidarity in Europe was enabled by older continental European fantasies about Indians, and sanctioned by some Eastern Bloc governments. However, as the case of Nicaragua shows, Indian – Marxist alliances could not be sustained because of the difficulties of reconciling U.S. patriotic anti-Communism, the Marxist revolutionary project, and the indigenous rights struggle.

Key words: Native Americans, sovereignty, solidarity, Marxists, Cold War, diplomacy.

Word count: 9995

Introduction

Just two months after the famous 1973 siege of Wounded Knee, the United Nations Secretary-General's office received a package from the National Amerindianist American Redman's Party. The packet spelled out a program for the full decolonization of American Indian reservations into an independent country called "Greater Ameridia Patria" - "[a]n Indian people and government ruled by the doctrine of socialism as practiced by our ancestry."¹ While the Redman's Party never resurfaced, their initiative was a manifestation of a distinct strand of Native American sovereignty activism that aimed to achieve full independence from the United States.

This article will construct a history of the mutual personal engagement of Native American sovereignty activists and various groups of Marxists in the 1970s and 1980s. Moving beyond analyses of the efficacy of Marxism as ideology or scholarly approach to American Indian and indigenous issues,² and scholarship on the Marxist perceptions and uses of American Indians,³ this study reconstructs direct encounters between Indian activists and representatives of people living under Marxism in the Cold War's frontline

¹ "National Amerindianist Party Platform." In "S-0271-0001-04. American Indians - Wounded Knee, South Dakota (2)." Electronic file version of hard copy documents. United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York City, New York. Acquired on-site January 2009.

² The vast majority of literature on Marxism and Native Americans have focused on either the applicability of Marxism as ideology to indigenous sovereignty, or the utility of Marxist frameworks for the scholarship of indigenous issues. The first category of studies includes Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press), 2014; Francisco Salas Pérez, "All Our Relations (of Production): Losing and Finding Marx in the Field of Indian Materialism." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 24, no. 3 (September 2013): 160-167; David Michael Smith, "Marxism and Native Americans Revisited". Sixth Native American Symposium, Southern Oklahoma State University. November 10, 2005. Online. <http://www.se.edu/nas/files/2013/03/Proceedings-2005-Smith.pdf>. Accessed November 2, 2018; David Bedford, "Marxism and the Aboriginal Question: The Tragedy of Progress." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 14, no. 1 (1994): 101-117; Russel Lawrence Barsh, "Contemporary Marxist Theory and Native American Reality." *American Indian Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (Summer, 1988): 187-211; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "The Fourth World and Indigenism: Politics of Isolation and Alternatives." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 79-105; and Richard Chase Smith and Shelton H. Davis, "Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz's 'The Fourth World and Indigenism: Politics of Isolation and Alternatives.'" *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 113-20; and Ward Churchill, ed. *Marxism and Native Americans* (Boston: South End Press, 1983). The second strand of inquiry is represented by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "The Relationship between Marxism and Indigenous Struggles and Implications of the Theoretical Framework for International Indigenous Struggles." *Historical Materialism* 24, no. 3 (2016): 76-91; Samuel W. Rose, "Marxism, indigenism, and the anthropology of Native North America: divergence and a possible future." *Dialectical Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): 13-31; Scott Simon, "Introduction: Indigenous Peoples, Marxism and Late Capitalism." In "Capitalism and Indigenous Peoples" special issue of *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (2011): 6-9; articles by in Charles R. Menzies, Frank James Tester, Kimberly Linkous Brown, and Dorothee Schreiber in the "Indigenous Nations and Marxism" special issue of *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (2010); David A. Muga, "Native Americans and the Nationalities Question: Premises for a Marxist Approach to Ethnicity and Self-Determination." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 31-51.

³ These include Anna Bánhegyi, "Where Marx Meets Osceola: Ideology and Mythology in the Eastern Bloc Western." PhD dissertation. Southern Methodist University, 2012; and Carol L. Bagle and Jo Ann Ruckman, "Iroquois Contributions to Modern Democracy and Communism." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 7, no. 2 (1983): 53-72.

city of Berlin, the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights, and revolutionary Nicaragua. Native American engagement with Marxist entities went beyond outflanking the American government in order to put pressure on it from the outside to reinstate or advance American Indian sovereignty rights within the U.S. nation state. The most radical of these instances of transnational diplomacy⁴ attempted to reconfigure both the geography and the ideologies of American Indian sovereignty into a fully independent Native America⁵ that was to be in alliance with revolutionary Marxism and its own 'red' nations around the globe. Solidarity between Native Americans and Marxists in Europe were enabled by a kind of hyper-identification and self-image that were rooted in older continental European fantasies about American Indians, and abetted by the sanctioning of popular solidarity with the putatively 'anti-imperialist' Native American independence struggle by some Eastern Bloc governments. However, I argue that as the case of Sandinista Nicaragua shows, these Native American – Marxist alliances could not be sustained because of the difficulties of reconciling U.S. patriotic anti-Communism, the Marxist revolutionary project, and the indigenous rights struggle. Recovering Cold War Native American transnational diplomacy rearticulates an American Indian embodied critique of the North American nation state, its foreign policy, and the global world order. Such a history of

⁴ I define *transnational* as ways of thinking, embodied practices, and alliances that reach across the borders of the US nation state, bypass the US government, and thereby transcend the nation. Transnational performances, relations, diplomacy or exchange can take place between a US 'domestic' group and another group from outside the U.S., or a U.S. 'domestic' group and a foreign government. This definition of *transnational* builds on Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association. My conceptual framework is indebted to the scholarship of Penny von Eschen, and is not meant to minimize the overwhelming power of the (nation) state even as it attempts to recover the limited agency of such groups. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies. Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." In *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (March 2005): 17-57. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

The Native American diplomacy of the Late Cold War was *transnational* because it involved American Indians outflanking the U.S. government and pressuring it from the outside to recognize, enact and respect their sovereignty rights. In their diplomacy – their demonstrations and solidarity rallies, fundraising concerts, diplomatic meetings, commemorations and press conferences – the Native sovereignty movement temporarily transcended the U.S. nation state both geographically and in that they articulated a Native status and identity outside of the U.S. nation state.

⁵ The American Indian sovereignty struggle of the Late Cold War resembled a national liberation movement in its goals: the activists of the American Indian Movement and its organization the International Indian Treaty Council actually wanted to achieve independence for various Native North American communities. Therefore, their efforts aimed at a profoundly *diplomatic* goal: a fully sovereign Indian country. Accordingly, their means included approaching the U.S. State Department, demonstrating and lobbying at the United Nations, building relations with European politicians and governments, Marxist regimes, and national liberation movements. These Native activists represented an all-Indian entity – "pan-Indianism" – as they conducted relations with the U.S. government, foreign governments, and other transnational movements. Their transnational program was *diplomacy* also because they reasserted their nations' prerogative to make treaties – an international *diplomatic* activity – and it also concerned maintaining peaceful relations, and making peace is reserved by the U.S. Constitution for the federal government, it is a governmental *diplomatic* power. Finally, the radical Native sovereignty movement sought recognition of treaty and sovereignty rights by various entities – a major object of *diplomatic* relations.

American Indians negotiating recognition and building alliances “in unexpected places”⁶ across the world both restores such transnational populations and social movements to their agency in the study of diplomatic activity, and expands our understanding of the reach and dynamic of the Cold War’s movements of decolonization, national liberation and revolutionary Marxism. It also serves as a corrective to studies of Cold War interracial Marxist solidarity, the most recent of which does not even mention Native Americans.⁷

Indians Are Not ‘Red’: Marxism and the Moderate Sovereignty Movement

American Indians were one of the groups who did not get to share in the spoils of the U.S. victory in World War Two. In fact, the postwar period inaugurated new assaults on Native American communities in U.S. federal Indian policy. The federal Indian Claims Commission, set up in 1946, aimed to adjudicate and provide monetary compensation for land taken from a Native nation – in return for them giving up all rights to pursue the claim in the future. Worse, through legislation like the 1953 House Concurrent Resolution 108 and Public Law 280, Congress aimed to transfer Indian reservations from federal into state jurisdiction, in effect ending the long-standing federal management of Indian affairs. These and the subsequent acts came to be known as the *termination policy*, which abolished the federal status of specific Indian tribes, and aimed to break up and sell their remaining communal lands, to pay out the proceeds to former tribal members. Concurrent federal programs like those of the 1956 Indian Relocation Act offered assistance in finding jobs and services to Indians who were willing to move to large urban centers. This policy aimed to make American Indians completely assimilate into U.S. society – by ending their collective political rights, federal services, and cultural and social organization. Termination withdrew federal recognition of even the kind of “impaired” sovereignty⁸ that had been achieved through the centuries of Native resistance to European and Euro-American colonialism. Termination thus became a baseline, a kind of legally mandated political and cultural annihilation, which the Indian sovereignty movement mobilized to avert.⁹

Whether out of genuine conviction or as a politically expedient strategy, the most influential Indian sovereignty activists of the early Cold War professed a stringently patriotic anti-Communism. Paul Rosier has identified and traced among American Indian military veterans the sensibility of “hybrid patriotism,” which rhetorically articulated

⁶ The phrase and concept are from Philip J. Deloria. Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (University Press of Kansas, 2004).

⁷ See Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

⁸ The term “impaired sovereignty” was first used in the *Johnson v. McIntosh* decision of the so-called Marshall trilogy of US Supreme Court rulings on Indian rights. This judicial opinion claimed that tribal sovereignty, while impaired by European colonization, still needs to be taken into consideration. *Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. 543 (1823). Justia US Supreme Court Center. Online. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/>. Accessed November 3, 2018.

⁹ For more on the sovereignty movement’s struggle to roll back the postwar federal termination policy, see Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: Norton, 2005).

their belonging both to the United States and to their Native nations.¹⁰ Daniel Cobb has documented how the National Congress of American Indians and the Association of American Indian Affairs argued that moving towards greater recognition of sovereignty rights was an integral part of the national struggle against Soviet totalitarianism as well as the domestic counterpart of U.S. aid for third world economic development.¹¹ Whether because of their own anti-Communist convictions, their investment in U.S. capitalism, or their wariness of the power of the U.S. government, these Indian leaders recoiled from an alliance with Soviet Russia.

A Darker Shade of ‘Red’: Marxism and the Radical Sovereignty Movement

By the late 1960s, the civil rights movement and US counterculture not only developed more radical forms of direct action, but also built links with transnational and national liberation movements. The next generation of Indian activists – many of them coming out of the University of Chicago and University of Colorado Boulder’s workshops on American Indian affairs – saw the sovereignty struggle less in the context of Western democracy’s struggle against Communism than as part of a global anticolonial movement.¹² This shift in Native positions opened up possibilities not only for alliance building with the Nonaligned Bloc and Third World liberation movements, but also for overtures to Marxist régimes.

With these new horizons, two kinds of attitudes emerged in the radical sovereignty movement towards Marxism and its manifestations. Some activists regarded Marxist régimes as potential partners in an Indian revolutionary project. In his speech to the First International Indian Treaty Conference in June 1974, American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means defined the sovereignty struggle itself as “*revolution*, turning that cycle of life always back. It is the sacred hoop that we are talking about.” For this Indian revolution to be successful, some members would have to be willing to spill blood, and sacrifice their lives metaphorically, or even literally, to the cause. This struggle would involve not only confrontations and lobbying within the US, but also “going to the world forums, [...] the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity, the Arab countries, *the communist bloc* and whatever is necessary for us to get our treaties in court and would give the world forums a chance to hear us [...]”¹³ While they may have shared a revolutionary commitment, for Means the U.S.S.R. and its socialist satellites were not necessarily ideological kin, but entities who could be enlisted as political allies in transnational Indian diplomacy.

¹⁰ Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9, 10-11, 110-160.

¹¹ Daniel Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 14, 18-21.

¹² For more see Chapter 3 “Dilemmas,” in *ibid.*, 58-79.

¹³ “14 June 1974 Speech to the International Indian Treaty Council Meeting” by Russell Means, 1-2. Emphases added. Roger A. Finzel American Indian Movement Papers. Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

The other kind of Native engagement with Marxism was exemplified by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, a self-professed Marxist revolutionary, women's liberator turned Indian sovereignty activist and historian. Dunbar-Ortiz got involved with AIM when she was studying law in 1973, and after working with the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offence Committee (WKLD/OC), became one of the early leaders of the International Indian Treaty Council, the transnational arm of the radical sovereignty movement. As she recalled, in late 1975

We linked up with a Native Marxist study group we learned about in Vancouver, British Columbia [...] Our goal was to apply Marxian analysis and national liberation theory to the history of colonization of Native Americans in North America, and to figure out a strategy of decolonization. Over the period of nearly two years [...] we met once or twice a week with a half-dozen other Native Marxists in the [San Francisco] Bay Area, studying Mao and the Chinese revolution. We regularly exchanged reports between our group and the Vancouver one.¹⁴

Committed to a Marxist revolutionary project of national liberation, Dunbar-Ortiz believed that the Indians of the Americas were part and parcel of the downtrodden working class in each country. She believed that national liberation movements should include indigenous populations, and that revolutionary régimes should recognize Indian sovereignty rights.¹⁵ The crux was the extent of Native sovereignty and status – autonomy or full independence. Importantly, this Native perception of Marxism called for a deep commitment and mutual collaboration between sovereignty activists and revolutionary movements and régimes.

Communists at Wounded Knee?

Such alliances first developed out of the dramatic media performances of the radical Indian sovereignty movement, and they were facilitated both by the press and fellow activists. In spite of the remoteness of the village and the tribal and federal government's efforts to minimize access, the spring 1973 siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota received media coverage both *within* and *beyond* of the U.S., including in the Eastern Bloc. At least one U.S. participant claimed knowledge of “an article published in a Soviet Weekly, featuring as its front cover a photo of an Oglala with a rifle.”¹⁶ As Lucie Kýrová uncovered, the exposé in question was published in the March 1973 issue of *Новое время* (*New Times*) a Soviet newspaper syndicated in the Eastern Bloc, and disseminated in the national languages of its satellite states. The article, titled “Another American Tragedy,” was actually written by Soviet journalist Iona Andronov, who had

¹⁴ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 31-32.

¹⁵ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2005) 17, 20, 51, 261.

¹⁶ Carol Sullivan, “The Indians and the Media” in “Perspectives on the Occupation of Wounded Knee” 5-9 Self-standing manuscript. No date, in the years after spring 1973. Carol Sullivan Papers, Center for Southwest Research, The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

spent three days at Wounded Knee, interviewing activists and the residents. Andronov was not any simple 'red' journalist – at one time, he also allegedly worked for the KGB.¹⁷

The magazine's cover page featured the black-and-white graphics of a photograph originally taken by Dagens Nyheter, depicting an Indian occupier of the village, brandishing a rifle with a scope, suggesting a sophisticated sniper weapon. The caption claimed that "American Indians are fighting against discriminatory government policies."¹⁸ Yet the real source of the rumors about Communists at Wounded Knee was most likely another firearm - Bobby Onco's "souvenir" AK-47 rifle, presumably originally made by or for, Communists forces in Vietnam. Another Native American Vietnam veteran,¹⁹ Woody Kipp in his memoir - tellingly titled *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee* - explained that during the siege he identified with Vietnam's 'red' guerrillas against the U.S. government.²⁰ While both the media and the various participants used metaphors of Vietnam and Korea for the armed conflict at Wounded Knee, this largely remained at the level of rhetoric. Yet some voices claimed that the occupiers were either advised or supplied by Marxists from the Eastern Bloc. These included Oglala tribal chairman Richard Wilson, and Wounded Knee trial witness for the prosecution Louis Moves Camp – key figures in the subsequent government crackdown on the American Indian Movement.²¹ Parallels between the Native American sovereignty struggle and Marxist or Marxist-influenced national liberation struggles were both part of the public discourse and the embodied experience of some of the participants at Wounded Knee, 1973 – and charges about direct Communist involvement only exacerbated the anti-activist attitudes in the U.S. in the wake of the siege .

The media depictions of events like the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties to Washington, D.C., and Wounded Knee 1973 further shaped European perceptions of American Indians. According to Bernd C. Peyer, the transatlantic reportage of the early 1970s "transformed the contemporary Indian into a primitivistic symbol of resistance

¹⁷ Lucie Kýrová. Personal communication. September 29, 2018. Also see "A Handy Tool or a Limited Sideshow: The Native American Rights Struggle and the Media." In Lucie Kýrová. "The Right to Think for Themselves': Native American Intellectual Sovereignty and Internationalism during the Cold War, 1950 - 1989." Unpublished PhD dissertation. College of William and Mary, December 2014.

¹⁸ Lucie Kýrová. Personal communication. September 29, 2018. Iona Andronov, "Ještě jedna americká tragédie," ("Another American Tragedy") *Nová doba* (Czechoslovak edition of the Soviet weekly *New Times*), No. 12 (March 28, 1973), 20-22.

¹⁹ Russell Means with Marvin J. Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 279; Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 206.

²⁰ Woody Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 126.

²¹ For various such charges, made on and off the record, see Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 276, 328; Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 176, 220; Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 192, 207; William S. White, "The Red Storm-Trooper Phenomenon" (originally Associated Press March 7, 1973), in *Akwesasne Notes* April 1973, 16. Underground Newspaper Collection, Center for Southwest Research, The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Michael J. Harner, "Wounded Knee." *The New York Times*, March 20, 1973, 39. "Wounded Knee Trial Resumes in Accord." *The New York Times*, August 27, 1974, 24.

against the system, in this case U.S. capitalism.” In the rooms of European leftist students “[i]mages of Geronimo and Sitting Bull were posted up alongside of Ché Guevara’s, and the AIM “Warrior” became their immediate reincarnation.”²² European Marxist governments soon realized the potential of this current image for anti-U.S. and anti-capitalist propaganda, and moved to exploit it. According to Friedrich von Borries and Jens-Uwe Fischer, the East German government “ideologically annexed the Wild West” when it officially promoted not only the Eastern Bloc-made westerns called *Indianerfilme*, but also projects of solidarity with Indians as historical victims of capitalist expansion on the American continent, and current resistance fighters against imperialism and colonialism.²³ This was a convergence of a previous grassroots cultural interest in American Indians and a state-sanctioned Marxist solidarity with the radical sovereignty movement.

This current interest by European Marxist groups and régimes in the American Indian sovereignty struggle had a long cultural prehistory. Since the 19th century, Central Europeans had been consuming and reproducing the cultural imaginary of the Indian warrior of the American Plains in a variety of forms. These included U.S. and European dime novels, the turn-of-the-century European tours of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, the fin-de-siècle novels of German author Karl May, and dozens of hobbyist groups who had re-enacted Native American cultures.²⁴ By the middle of the Cold War, this general fascination with American Indians had intensified as cultural production and consumption became an ideological battleground. Throughout much of the 1960s, West Germany produced some dozen film adaptations of the novels of fin-de-siècle German author Karl May about the friendship between a German immigrant and an Apache chief in the Southern Plains of the 19th century U.S., and their alliance against bloodthirsty and greedy white bandits and Indian tribes. The East German government responded by supporting the production of a dozen so-called *Indianerfilme* - historical adventure movies about Native resistance to the encroachment of Euro-American capitalism and imperialism on Indian land and culture. These movies were often co-productions by several Eastern Bloc countries, and they starred Yugoslavian athlete turned actor Gojko Mitić as the noble Indian warrior or chief. These films infused the imaginary of ‘the American Indian’ with ostensible ‘historical accuracy,’ and the kind of historical

²² Bernd C. Peyer, “Who is Afraid of AIM?” In *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Aachen: Edition Herodt-Rader Verlag, 1987), 551

²³ Friedrich von Borries and Jens-Uwe Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys: Der Wilde Westen Ostdeutschlands* [Socialist Cowboys: The Wild West of East Germany] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 41-43.

²⁴ For selected scholarship on the topic, see James MacKay and David Stirrup, eds., *Tribal Fantasies: Native Americans in the European Imaginary, 1900-2010* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and American Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Pamela Kort and Max Hollein, eds., *I Like America: Fictions of the Wild West*. München (New York: Prestel, 2006); Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemünden and Suzanne Zantop, eds., *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); and Christian F. Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays* (Aachen: Edition Herodot Rader-Verlag, 1987).

materialism that was a hallmark of Marxism as an ideology.²⁵ Both series of movies were shot on location in Nonaligned Yugoslavia, making the actual landscape as well as the European imaginary of American Indians a site of ideological struggle. As a result of the German appropriation of such imaginary Indians on both sides of the iron curtain, Cold War solidarity with the Native American sovereignty movement became a political act of faith, especially in the Eastern Bloc.

‘Red’ Pen Pals: The Native American – Marxist Solidarity Correspondence

The defenders of Wounded Knee also had their own representatives overseas. According to memoirs, during the siege AIM leader Vernon Bellecourt served as the occupiers’ “roving ambassador,” traveling outside of the U.S., holding press conferences, creating phrases for sound bites, lecturing on television, and making speeches in countries like Italy.²⁶ The response was impressive: numerous messages of solidarity arrived at the U.S. radical Native newspaper *Akwesasne Notes* from European countries. Among them were a letter from Bulgaria signed by 28, and two missives from young people in East Germany, with 52 and 36 signatures respectively, expressing solidarity “with the people of Wounded Knee who have given a world-wide signal, with all Indian people defending their existence as Indian people.”²⁷ Whether they were grassroots initiatives or encouraged by Marxist home governments, these messages of solidarity were signs of an interest in the sovereignty struggle from groups living in the Communist Bloc.

American Indian radical sovereignty activists soon seized the opportunity to personally meet and build alliances with groups in societies under Marxist régimes. As early as in 1973, a delegation of American Indians traveled to East Berlin to participate in the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students. Among them were veterans of the siege of Wounded Knee that had taken place earlier that year. These AIM activists were hailed in the Eastern Bloc as the heroes of a shared resistance against imperialism, and the Socialist state capitalized on this. The East German press covered the visit in detail: the *Neue Deutschland*, the foreign affairs paper *Horizont*, and the official youth daily *Junge Welt* all carried interviews with the AIM activists, and thereby amplified the messages of their movement.²⁸

Junge Welt: How can the young people of [East Germany] help you?

Monica Charles: They can morally support us. This is important for the Indians who are in a very difficult struggle. Whoever wants to help the Indians, can send their greetings of solidarity, preferably in English, to this address: USA, Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee, Rapid City, SD 57 761. This is a committee for the defense of Indian

²⁵ Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 46-51. All subsequent quotes translated by the author into English. For more on the infusion of Marxism in the East German *Indianerfilme*, see Anna Bánhegyi, “Where Marx Meets Osceola.”

²⁶ Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 295, Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 202

²⁷ *Akwesasne Notes* Aug-Oct 1973, 44-46. Underground Newspaper Collection.

²⁸ Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 63-66.

rights. Maybe with your support and the support of other countries, we can again fight against our government for the rights we are entitled to.²⁹

In response to the calls, letters of solidarity and resolutions of protest were drafted across East Germany. In 1974, three high school girls in Sebnitz – later founders of the Cheyenne Indianist Interest Group - wrote:

To all Indians of Wounded Knee,

We have followed the developments on Pine Ridge with great sympathy. Each of your achievements raised our hopes for an eventual victory in your struggle at Wounded Knee. With these developments, our happiness grew. This is why we would like to convey our most sincere greetings of solidarity. We hope that you will secure the rights promised to you, and that equality will be achieved in society.³⁰

While material support soon came to be crucial, WKLD/OC and European support groups were also communicating on another level – that of solidarity. In response to AIM's calls for support, letters of solidarity, resolutions of protest, and petitions were drafted across Europe, and sent to WKLD/OC.³¹ Some European expressions of solidarity made common cause with American Indian activists by asserting shared goals and enemies.³² Other European writers placed the Indian sovereignty movement into a larger international class struggle against capitalism.³³ Whether using it as compulsory rhetoric or an abiding internationalist commitment, national liberation organizations and Marxists on both sides of the iron curtain claimed common cause with American Indians in fighting for freedom from a dominant Western power.

By far the most messages of solidarity with the Wounded Knee defendants and the movement arrived from the German Democratic Republic. While many of these were plain letters from students,³⁴ others were more formally constructed petitions from clubs and associations sanctioned under East German cultural policy.³⁵ In their letters, German writers often assured Native sovereignty activists of the broad-based support in their

²⁹ "Interview mit der AIM-Indianerin Monica Charles," *Junge Welt* August 17, 1973. Quoted in *ibid.*, 65-66

³⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 66

³¹ "Letters of Solidarity." Box 24. Location 151.K.3.9B. "Letters." Box 93. "Correspondence: Foreign fund-raising, solidarity, and information requests." Box 95. Undated petition in English. "Petitions: Foreign and domestic." Box 100. "Petitions: Foreign and domestic." Location 146.H.13.4F. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

³² December 5, 1973 letter from Seán O Cionnaith of International Affairs Bureau of the Irish Republican Movement, Dublin, Ireland. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

³³ October 1974 letter from Andreas Erdmann of East Germany. February 21, 1975 letter from Andreas Wollmann, East Berlin. Undated letter from H. Marius Spanier of Hannover, West Germany. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

³⁴ Quoted in von Borries and Fischer, 66. Translation by Toth. In "Letters of Solidarity." Box 95. Location 151.K.3.9B and in "Petitions: Foreign and domestic." Box 100. Location 146.H.13.4F. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

³⁵ May 20, 1974 letter from How-kola-Klub Völkerkundliche Kulturgruppe Zur Pflege des Brauchtums der Prärieindianer. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

countries.³⁶ For East Germans, writing such messages of solidarity meant doing their duty to a Communist state that aggressively positioned itself as a champion of an international class struggle including colonized peoples – most recently through its official international solidarity campaign on behalf of Angela Davis, whose June 1972 acquittal from charges of complicity in an armed assault by Black Panthers was widely regarded as a true victory against American imperialism.³⁷ For both Germans and Indians, these assurances served as encouragement and expression of solidarity. Yet for Germans, these letters likely also maintained a self-image of Germanness that latently spanned the iron curtain.

In turn, WKLD/OC's activists responded to German messages of solidarity with surprised gratitude and sharing a renewed commitment to the cause.³⁸ The legal team's responses soon developed a remarkable trope.³⁹ Even more than with other European support groups, WKLD/OC's activists felt a kinship with Germans, because these groups and individuals seemed to know about the Indian past and to care about the current struggle disproportionately more than most Americans, or other European nationality groups. For WKLD/OC volunteers, who saw themselves as a lone island struggling against the government's assaults in a sea of uncaring white people, such financial and moral support from overseas meant a spiritual and social boost, an infusion of faith that they were not alone in their struggle.

European supporters of the radical Indian sovereignty movement derived satisfaction from the successes of WKLD/OC, which also likely reinforced their self-image as individuals, groups and societies actively contributing to the survival of American Indians. Their donations, messages of solidarity and petitions⁴⁰ seemed to bear fruit when the vast majority of the 200 or so AIM Wounded Knee defendants were acquitted of their charges in court.⁴¹ In 1977, Judge Robert Merhige, who had originally

³⁶ April 5, 1974 from Ingrid Jakob, Coburg, West Germany. September 27, 1974 letter from Marion Busch from East Germany. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

³⁷ Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany & the United States in the Global Sixties*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010, 134-142. Oct 28, 1974, letter from Andreas Erdmann of East Germany. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee, Minnesota Historical Society, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

³⁸ Undated letter to Ingrid Jakob of Coburg, West Germany. April 10, 1974 letter to unnamed addressee. February 12, 1974 letter from WKLD/OC to Irish Committee for the Defense of Wounded Knee. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

³⁹ June 5, 1974, letter to Miss Marlis Horn of Hamburg, West Germany. Undated letter to Axel Schulze-Thulin of German American Indian Group. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

⁴⁰ "Petitions: foreign and domestic." Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

⁴¹ John William Sayer, *Ghost Dancing the Law: The Wounded Knee Trials* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 228; "Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee: An Inventory of Its Records at the Minnesota Historical Society." Online finding aid. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00229.xml>. Accessed June 27, 2019. September 27, 1974 letter from Marion Bush from East Germany. October 18, 1974 letter from C. Sanger, East Berlin. October 13, 1974, letter from Herbert Leisdahner of "Committee American Indian Movement, Betriebschule des VEB Robur." Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

sentenced AIM medicine man Leonard Crow Dog to prison, summoned the defense team to his court in Virginia, showed them some of the petitions that he had received from all over the world, and re-sentenced Crow Dog to time already served.⁴²

Transatlantic Crossings: Personal Encounters between Marxists and Indian Sovereignty Activists

Even as they soon started sending in-kind support to the US,⁴³ the young East German Indianists were not content with exchanging officially sanctioned gestures through the media and correspondence. “Chiefi,” the leader of a cultural hobbyist club in Triptis took a group to East Berlin to personally meet the 1973 youth festival’s AIM delegation, who liked the young and enthusiastic East Germans so much that they invited them to their after-hours campfire. “Of course the security did not want to let us in there” because they were not official delegates to the Festival. At the AIMsters’ insistence, they were finally allowed in. “Then we sat and drummed in a staircase until 4 in the morning.” The Thüringian youth ended up accompanying the American Indian delegation for the whole week. After the official events of the day, there was dancing and singing every night. After the conference, “Chiefi” and delegate Jim Castilla spent an extra week in Fürstenwalde, where Castilla trained German hobbyists in the traditional sweat lodge ceremony, an important Native religious ritual.⁴⁴ Reaching beyond the festival’s official slogan of “Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Peace and Friendship,” these instances of transnational Indian diplomacy resulted in more intimate personal and spiritual experiences that strengthened the transatlantic alliance in the making.

In the following years, as the transatlantic crossings continued, a peculiar Native-Marxist network began to materialize. At the invitation of the World Council of Churches, AIM leader Clyde Bellecourt toured Europe in 1974,⁴⁵ and the following year Dennis Banks and Vernon Bellecourt visited author Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich in East Berlin. As Glenn Penny has shown, this was an important development. As a university professor and popular author of Indian-themed novels, Welskopf-Henrich had been favored by the East German government and commanded a wide following in the GDR and the Eastern Bloc.⁴⁶ Moving away from her earlier historical treatments even as she continued consulting for the *Indianerfilme*, Welskopf-Henrich had been writing a fiction pentalogy titled *The Blood of Eagles* dealing with current-day Indian issues.⁴⁷ By late 1974, Welskopf-Henrich herself had made at least one visit to the United States, where she had met Richard Erdoes, an Austro-Hungarian émigré illustrator turned writer closely

⁴² Crow Dog and Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 238-9.

⁴³ Ibid., 78-79, 153, 155-156.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 55. The authors of the original book changed the German names to protect the privacy of their respondents.

⁴⁵ Bernd C. Peyer, “Who is Afraid of AIM?” In Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe*, 551

⁴⁶ For more on Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, see Glenn Penny, “Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich and Indian Activist Networks in East and West Germany,” *Central European History* 41 (2008): 447-476.

⁴⁷ Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 44, 47.

involved with the radical sovereignty movement. In her letters written to Erdoes in November 1974 and April 1975, Welskopf-Henrich thanked him and his family for their hospitality, shared her hopes that she would be able to publish Erdoes' latest book in German, and reported that she had asked her readers to send petitions to the U.S. on behalf of Russell Means, currently in custody on charges stemming from a shooting.⁴⁸ Through their visits and correspondence, the AIM leaders, Erdoes, and Welskopf-Henrich were building a Rapid City – New York – Berlin axis for the transatlantic sovereignty alliance.

These Native – Marxist encounters proved to be so promising that on their 1975 visit, Dennis Banks and Vernon Bellecourt authorized the opening of an AIM office in West Berlin.⁴⁹ In her February 1975 letter to Erdoes, German volunteer Regina Mayer described the activists' work:

After Clyde [Bellecourt] left, many people came up to us and showed their interest in the situation of the native Americans today. So we started giving radio-interviews, we are having speaking-engagements all the time in schools, universities not only in Berlin but also in West-Germany, we do many benefit-concerts, but we still hardly get any money in. The universities don't pay for those speaking-engagements. Also we have a 14-day thing going in the University of Erlangen, showing films, give speeches, discussion-groups, a photo-exhibition, etc. [...]⁵⁰

Besides the author, the letter was signed by "Brigit," Alex White Plume, Robert Red Eagle, and Pete "Wyoming" Bender. The latter was the same West German performer who back in 1971 had sent *Akwesasne Notes* a call for Native musicians to put together a production of Indian poetry.⁵¹ Albums recorded by Pete "Wyoming" Bender in 1972 and 1978 featured songs with titles like "Indian War Dance" and "Born to be Indian."⁵² A February 1976 diplomatic cable from the U.S. Embassy in West Berlin reported that East Berlin's recently held annual festival of political songs featured "an American Indian singer named "Wyoming," who in newspaper reports is pictured sitting at the piano singing his own composition, "Freedom." The embassy cable noted that one major East German newspaper described "Wyoming" as "a spokesman for the Indian freedom movement," who was "sentenced to many years in jail last August by American racist justice for his political opinion and action."⁵³ An undated photograph taken during these years is titled "warrior" and depicts Pete "Wyoming" Bender singing behind the piano, with shoulder-length hair, wearing a beret with a patch that depicts what looks to

⁴⁸ Letters to Richard Erdoes from Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, 8/11/1974; 1/4/1975. Richard Erdoes Papers.

⁴⁹ Bernd C. Peyer, "Who is Afraid of AIM?" In Christian F. Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe*, 551

⁵⁰ Letter to Richard Erdoes from Regina Mayer White Plume, February 13, 1975. Richard Erdoes Papers.

⁵¹ Letters section of *Akwesasne Notes* Dec 1971, 47. Underground Newspaper Collection.

⁵² "Discography LP's." Pete Wyoming Bender homepage (moribund). <http://www.pete-wyoming-bender.de/>

⁵³ February 11, 1976 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin to the Secretary of State, Washington, D.C. State Department Records. Online database. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073&cat=all&bc=sl>

be a tipi with the U.S. flag upside down – an AIM signal of distress.⁵⁴ Wearing a beret similar to that worn by Dennis Banks at Wounded Knee in 1973⁵⁵, this white singer of unclear nationality⁵⁶ performed a sovereign Indianness in his on-stage persona. His transatlantic protest performance for Native sovereignty made him appear Indian to German audiences and the U.S. government from across the iron curtain. His performance served as fodder for East German anti-U.S. propaganda, but it also put the U.S. government on alert that American Indians were engaging in diplomacy in the Central European contact zone. It also stretched the transatlantic sovereignty movement to confer a kind of Indian identity on non-Natives who were willing to work for the movement – to engage ‘playing Indian’ for sovereignty.

For their own part, the Indian sovereignty activists reported back to their North American communities about their diplomacy in the Eastern Bloc and the Nonaligned countries. After their breakthrough 1977 United Nations Non-Governmental Organizations International Conference on Discrimination against the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas in Geneva, Switzerland, the activists of AIM and its International Indian Treaty Council fanned out across Europe to build alliances. As reported in the November 1977 issue of the *Treaty Council News*, Allene Goddard, Bill Means, Greg Zephier, and Bill Wahpepah undertook a tour of the USSR. In Moscow they met the Soviet Peace Council, government officials, educators, and the press. The group toured the Kremlin, and two of them visited the Moscow Ballet. A University of Moscow ethnographer presented them with eagle feathers from Siberia, and they appeared on Soviet TV, broadcast to some 180 million viewers. Next the delegation visited the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan, where they were impressed with the Kremlin’s progressive policies for Kazakhs as a minority “of color.” Goddard then visited the Soviet Republic of Mongolia, while Zephier and Wahpepah went to West Germany for a meeting of support groups from all over Europe. The same issue of the newsletter carried an account titled “These Countries Believe Strongly in Human Rights,” written by Russell Means’ 15 year-old daughter Sherry about their trip across Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary and East Germany in that same year. In Bulgaria, where they were treated as guests of the government, the sovereignty delegation met with members of the country’s Central Committee and the World Peace Council. In East Germany, the Indian visitors learned about the history of “the Sorbs,” an ethnic minority, whose human rights were now protected under socialism. “That goes to show what a lie the Americans are living” with their anti-Communist propaganda. Although the group had to cut short their trip and forego visiting Greece,

⁵⁴ “pete – revo,” “pete -- warrior” Photographs on Pete Wyoming Bender homepage (moribund).

⁵⁵ One of the photographs recording this is “Russell Means and Dennis Banks” Unidentified Artist, 1973 NPG.2005.32 Online database of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. Online. <https://npg.si.edu/media/A5000064C.jpg> . Accessed November 5, 2018.

⁵⁶ According to his English biography on his (now moribund) website, Bender was born in France but spent much of his childhood in the United States before moving with his father “back to Germany.” The lyrics of his hit “Born to be Indian” were “written by his brother Zeph Zephier Sr. (a Yankton Sioux). Pete was adopted by the family and tribe. Pete was also member of the American Indian Movement and speaker for the German office for some time.” This kind of positioning of a white person “adopted” by Native North Americans and being a member of the radical sovereignty movement is itself a transatlantic form of ‘playing Indian.’ Biography. Pete Wyoming Bender homepage (moribund). <http://www.pete-wyoming-bender.de/>

Czechoslovakia, Romania and Ireland because her father had to report to court for a bond violation, Sherry Means had seen enough to conclude that “what I have learned in these countries is that they believe strongly in human rights and for our struggle. They aren’t the people to feel sorry for. They have no poverty or competition with each other, and nobody wants to get rich because they all have equal opportunities.”⁵⁷

Did the sovereignty activists really believe the official Marxist propaganda given them about minority rights in the Eastern Bloc? There are a number of reasons why they have reported favorably on the policies of these Communist countries. Even though the visitors and some of their hosts sometimes managed to wriggle their way out of supervision (like at the East Berlin youth festival), state control was likely prevalent and tight on their official trips. This probably did not allow them to experience much on their own terms. The travelers may also have decided to report on their experiences strategically. On the pages of the *Treaty Council News*, they likely wanted to boost the sagging morale in Indian Country⁵⁸ with depictions of countries where both the political leaders and the people lived in harmony and embraced the causes of human rights and sovereignty. If they were read by government officials in Eastern Europe, these reports would have also endeared the Indian sovereignty movement to them. Favorable reporting on Marxist régimes thus worked both ways across the Atlantic.

Too Much Solidarity? Native American – Marxist Engagement through the ‘Red’ Eye of the State

East German, and to a lesser extent, Eastern Bloc solidarity with AIM was a convergence of a more general grassroots cultural interest in American Indians and a state sanctioned Marxist solidarity with the radical sovereignty movement. *Kulturbund*, the government-controlled cultural association of the German Democratic Republic seized on the figure of the American Indian as a tool of anti-American propaganda.⁵⁹ At the same time as it elevated American Indians, the East German state proceeded to ‘purge’ the Wild West fandom in the country. Cowboys, white pioneers and frontier people were designated as the “henchmen” of U.S. imperialism. Originally opened in 1928, the Karl May Museum of Radebeul was renamed “Indian Museum” in 1956, and references to Indians killing General George Custer or playing in Buffalo Bill’s show were removed from the exhibits. Finally, the Museum was moved to Bamberg just one year before the Berlin Wall was completed.⁶⁰ As part of the ideologically correct

⁵⁷ “Indian Delegation Visits Soviet Union.” *Treaty Council News* Nov 1977, 3; ““These Countries Believe Strongly in Human Rights.”” By Sherry Means. *Treaty Council News* Nov 1977, 4. Original title in quotation marks. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council, San Francisco, California.

⁵⁸ By the late 1970s, the U.S. government’s relentless legal campaign against AIM, and tribal chairman Dick Wilson’s reign of terror on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota were taking their toll on the radical Indian sovereignty movement. Some of their leading activists, like Pedro Bissonette and Anna Mae Aquash, had been killed; others, like Dennis Banks, Russell Means, Leonard Crow Dog and Leonard Peltier, were either being prosecuted in court or had already been sentenced to prison terms up to life.

⁵⁹ Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 122.

⁶⁰ Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 18-19, 31-32.

realignment of popular culture, East German and Hungarian authorities also made sure to remove any firearms from Wild West fan communities,⁶¹ and the former also suppressed cowboy fandom. In response, re-enactors of white frontiers people pretended to impersonate Indians in public, and indulged in playing cowboys in private.⁶² Clandestine cowboy life largely came to an end after some clubs were shut down and others reorganized into Indianist fan circles.⁶³

While it lasted, the official condoning of solidarity with American Indians by the East German state facilitated some transatlantic contacts. In his October 1974 letter to WKLD/OC, Andreas Erdmann explained, “In summer 1974, during my holidays – I’m 18 years old and (what you would call) a college student – I had a chance to see the “Indianer Museum” (i.e. a museum concerned with history and life of the Northern American Indians) at Radebeul near Dresden. There I could increase my knowledge about your life, fight, and culture. There I also found your address.”⁶⁴ By the mid-1970s, the GDR authorities had refashioned the former “reactionary” Karl May Museum into a center that actually fostered anti-imperialist solidarity with American Indians.

With time, however, the official sanctioning of the alliance between Native sovereignty activists and Eastern Bloc solidarity groups reached its limits. As more East Germans raised money, held teach-ins, collected signatures, and sent petitions to the U.S. on behalf of AIM “political prisoners” like Leonard Peltier,⁶⁵ the Marxist state’s secret police moved to keep the solidarity movement under control. After all, it was suspicious enough that thousands of hobbyists studied and re-enacted Indian lifeways – an aspect of the culture of the United States of America, a mortal enemy for the past three decades.⁶⁶ While official and grassroots arguments may have converged in depicting Indians as part of the international working class and originally following a kind of proto-Communism as asserted by Friedrich Engels,⁶⁷ East German solidarity activists were not allowed to visit their comrades in the United States or other Western countries.⁶⁸ However, the ultimate fear of those in power was that solidarity activists would move from demanding human and sovereignty rights for American Indians to asserting freedom of speech and

⁶¹ Ibid., 32-33; Interview with long-time member and leader of the Bakony group of Hungarian Indianist hobbyists, June 2011. Source kept anonymous to protect personal identity.

⁶² Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 31-32, 54.

⁶³ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁴ October 28, 1974 letter to WKLD/OC from Andreas Erdmann of Neuruppin. Original in English. Records of the Wounded Knee Legal Defense / Offense Committee.

⁶⁵ In 1977, Leonard Peltier was sentenced to consecutive life terms in prison for the killing of two FBI agents on the Jumping Bull Ranch in June 1975. The radical Indian sovereignty movement embarked on a still ongoing international campaign to win the release of Peltier. Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 67; the Treaty Council’s Jimmie Durham also attended a peace conference in Warsaw, Poland May 1977, which issued resolutions calling for international campaigns supporting Native American “political prisoners” Skyhorse, Mohawk, and Peltier. “Treaty Council at World Peace Conference,” *Council News* June 1977, 2. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council.

⁶⁶ Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 33,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 41, 43, 60, 86-87

⁶⁸ Ibid., 68-69, 78-79

democratic government under their own Marxist state.⁶⁹ The metaphors of solidarity threatened to spin out of control and loosen political demands on the East German state itself. According to Anja Kunze, the East German state security investigated Indian hobbyists if they had contacts with or requested a permit to travel to the West, were suspected or actual members of churches, or the environmentalist movement.⁷⁰ As attested by their security files, the East German authorities usually assumed that doing solidarity work with the current Indian sovereignty struggle were in reality a foil for activities against the state. Solidarity activists who went 'too far' in speech and action experienced social pressure, monitoring, investigations, and re-education by the Marxist state security.⁷¹ State surveillance reached through to the central node of the East German solidarity movement: by the late 1980s, the very "Coordinator of the Solidarity Issues of the Indianist Groups of the GDR" himself informed on the Native American - Marxist alliance to the Communist secret police under the name of "Hans."⁷²

Native American activists were not oblivious to this politics of solidarity during their visits with Eastern Bloc solidarity groups. One of "Hans'" very targets, Lakota medicine man Lame Deer was aware of the dangers of collaborating with the Eastern Bloc governments. His description of being tailed by security services echoed Russell Means' memories of various U.S. and communist intelligence services bugging his car.⁷³

Of course, you might get in the process of being caught in the trap of one of the governments, by the government asking you to, that they will fund your trip and everything else, and by doing that you are jumping into the pocket of the socialist government. So you have to know exactly what you're doing at all times. We are, many times when we leave, when I leave the East Bloc countries, I'm followed for four days by the KGB, the counterpart of the CIA, they follow me throughout the places where I go to make sure that I don't go to any American embassy, because I see a lot of sensitive information [...]⁷⁴

Archie Fire Lame Deer tried to tread a fine line between being co-opted by the East German government for purposes of anti-U.S. political propaganda, and risking being denied access to the people of East Germany, who he wanted to encourage for solidarity and support of the American Indian sovereignty movement. Aware of the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 135-136. For such a perspective among Czechoslovak Indian hobbyists, see John Paskievich, dir., documentary *If Only I Were an Indian* (Winnipeg: National Film Board of Canada, 1995).

⁷⁰ Anja Kunze, "Die Indianistikszone der DDR" [The Indianist Scene of the German Democratic Republic] (Master's Thesis in European Ethnography and Geography. Humboldt University of Berlin, October 2006), 65-66. Library of the Federal Commissioner for the files of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic. Berlin.

⁷¹ Ibid., 136. Such measures of state control were not exclusive to East Germany. Hungarian state security also monitored Indianist hobby groups. See Melinda Kovai, "Az 'Indiánok' fedőnevű ügy" [Operation "Indians"] In special issue on "Surveillance", *AnBlok* magazine 3, (2009): No pagination. Table of contents at <http://www.anblokk.hu/folyoirat/lapszamok/7>

⁷² File "XIV 1418/85, Karl-Marx Stadt, "Hans." 000069. Federal Commissioner for the files of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic.

⁷³ Means with Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 368, 369

⁷⁴ "Ceremony & Sundance, Europe, Do's & Don'ts; Beer & Alcohol, etc., Europe?" Undated audio recording of Archie Fire Lame Deer, 1/2. Richard Erdoes Papers.

dangers, for much of the 1980s he kept traveling, building solidarity relations, and teaching Europeans about Native American spirituality in Central Europe.

Native American – Marxist Transnational Diplomacy in Central Europe

For his part, during his visits to East Germany Archie Fire Lane Deer was performing his own kind of ‘red’ solidarity for Indian sovereignty. His talk at a solidarity rally in Triptis in 1986 was carefully calibrated to satisfy the Communist state - or so a sympathetic “Hans” chose to portray it in his report. Lane Deer thanked the East Germans for their solidarity and expressed hope for their continued support. He also described schemes to use organs in the Soviet Union to promote the causes of sovereignty. Through the help of the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Lane Deer hoped that some 17 million postcards would be sent to the White House, demanding a new trial for Leonard Peltier. He also wanted to invite Mikhail Gorbachev to the sun dance at Big Mountain, Arizona, to help prevent the forced relocation of the Hopi and Navajo from the Joint Use Area.⁷⁵

Discussing his trips to East Germany a few years later in oral history interviews with Richard Erdoes, Lane Deer recalled his encounters of solidarity in East Germany.

We went to a May Day parade in Leipzig, and as we stood there in the parade, watching all these Russian tanks and missiles, my son says, “My hair keeps blowing in my eyes, I can’t see!” Without thinking, I handed him my knife, and he reached over, and he cut the red flag behind us, but we didn’t see him, and he tore off the bottom half of the red flag. And all the generals started to look to see what he was doing, and I looked, and there he was, cutting off the bottom half of the American... I mean, the Russian red flag... I said, Oh-oh, something is going to happen now. All the people on parade, they were looking at us, the soldiers and everybody, and all the people beyond that, they were very quiet. And I helped him cut off the rest of the flag, and I tied it on his head to hold the hair back, as a head band, and I got an applause from the people! And later when the parade was over, the general turned to me, and said, “You Indian people are more red than us!” [laughter] This was his immediate reaction. And it felt good, I could feel the people clapping and everything. Of course, this guy was a Russian general, he was not an East German general, he was a Russian general.⁷⁶

As guests of honor of the East German state, the Indian visitors were standing with the generals and party cadres on or near the parade tribune. Yet as Lane Deer’s slip of the tongue shows, they still performed a mischievous Indianness that poked fun at the nation state, whether it was the U.S., the German Democratic Republic, or the Soviet Union. Most importantly for this context, the Indian boy with a headband had been a stock image of the transatlantic forms of ‘playing Indian’⁷⁷ - immediately recognizable to the East Germans and the Soviet general. Thus, whether intentionally or unwittingly, Lane Deer

⁷⁵ 000173, Federal Commissioner for the files of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic.

⁷⁶ “Archie Fire, Tape 3; Wolakota.” Audio recording, 1/2. March 2, 1986. Richard Erdoes Papers.

⁷⁷ Here I use Philip J. Deloria’s analytical term “playing Indian” for the performance of Indianness by white Americans to fashion a variety of collective identities for themselves. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 5, 7-8.

and his son ended up manipulating the transatlantic stereotype of American Indians, and thereby actually made a statement about solidarity among 'red' nations across the Atlantic and the iron curtain.

In his 1986 interview with Richard Erdoes, Lame Deer recalled a meeting with an East German official which resulted in mutual understanding of the shared conditions that made for solidarity between East Germans and American Indians.

While we were [at the hobbyist encampment], the first day we had a visitor. He was the defense minister of East Germany. He came to the tipi and he knocked on the tipi, and my son and I were sitting inside, we [were] expecting him, we had coffee made and sitting there. And he walked in, and he said good morning, "Guten Morgen." And immediately, my son said "Danke schoen," thank you very much. And the defense minister said "Bitte schoen," you're welcome. And my son answered back "Auf wiedersehen," [ERDOES LAUGHS] good bye. And the defense minister sat down, and he looked me and he said in perfect English, "There are many people I would like to say that same thing to, "auf wiedersehen." Right away, the defense minister and I got acquainted.

We discussed world affairs inside that tipi [ERDOES: Tell me about that.] About his feelings of the Indian people over here, and themselves, being under the rule of the Russian people. The feeling that they had towards the way they were living today. [ERDOES: He was open about that?] Yes, he was very open. [ERDOES: He must have trusted you.] two or three people with us. He trusted me as I would trust him. I trust all people until proven otherwise. [ERDOES: And he didn't look upon the Russians as the Great White Father, so to speak?] No, no, I imagine it was because I immediately opened up as an oppressed people of the American people. We are oppressed regardless of what the BIA Indian would say. [...] So in the process of all this talking to him of how we were oppressed, he sympathized with us, and he said that the country of East Germany everywhere is open to you, you can come and go as you please, anytime, you and your people can come and go whenever you want to, and you will be treated like you've never been treated in America.

[... ERDOES: And he indicated that – East Germany was also an oppressed country?] He mentioned the fact that East Germany, "like you, we are in the same boat, we are oppressed just like you." So there is a feeling there, when he left, he said, "Your fight is my fight." And the reason why he said this was, "How long will you come to East Germany?" And I mentioned the fact that "I will come until your fences fall down. Until you two countries are united, and long before that. After that, I will come. I will come, and I will see your fences fall down." And then he turned to me, and he said, "Your fight is my fight. Maybe together, we can make the fences fall down."⁷⁸

The hobbyist tipi – itself a prop for East German Indian play – now served as a space for dialogue in the Central European contact zone. In Lame Deer's understanding, he and the East German official related their shared experience of oppression by a dominant group and its government, and made common cause against the imperialism of the two superpowers. The scene is reminiscent of both the treaty negotiations of the early U.S. national period and the earlier Native contact zone diplomacy of the colonial and

⁷⁸ "Archie Fire, Tape 3; Wolakota." Audio recording, 1/2. March 2, 1986. Richard Erdoes Papers.

revolutionary era.⁷⁹ As far as it can be reconstructed, the actual event was a transnational performance of solidarity for sovereignty. Its recalling in Lane Deer's oral history interview with Erdoes was itself a collaborative performance that reaffirmed the spiritual leader's original commitment to the people of East Germany.

Too Much Solidarity? Europeans 'Playing Indian'

Other constraints on the transatlantic solidarity movement were gradually imposed by the Indian sovereignty activists themselves. Retaining control over the movement was a major concern for Native Americans, who for centuries had been excluded by U.S. government officials and white Indian reformers from making and implementing policies for their communities. In September 1975 the sovereignty activists established the Native American Solidarity Committee to coordinate "Non-Indians [who] are mobilizing in the support of the American political activists in prison or facing trials [...], are taking up the defense of Native American land rights and struggles for political power; and are opening broad discussions on the relationship of the Native American struggle to the class struggle and other oppressed nationality struggles in the U.S."⁸⁰ Employing a leftist if not fully Marxist rhetoric, the NASC at the same time attempted to broaden the radical sovereignty coalition and to retain Native control over non-Indian solidarity work.

Nationally, Indian activists educated white Americans about why and how to stop 'playing Indian', and how to make their representations of Indians legitimate.⁸¹ Asserting and maintaining Native control over the movement *outside* the US proved to be even more challenging. With new solidarity groups and organizations cropping up across and

⁷⁹ Such scholarship includes Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Leonard J. Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations: Indians, Empires, and Diplomats in the Founding of America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Timothy J. Shannon, *Iroquois Diplomacy on the Early American Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2008); Tom Arne Midtrød, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); John T. Juricek, *Colonial Georgia and the Creeks: Anglo-Indian Diplomacy on the Southern Frontier, 1733-1763* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Charles A. Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground: The Diplomacy of Natchez, Boukhouka, Nogales, and San Fernando de las Barrancas, 1791-1795* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); and *Documents of American Indian Diplomacy: Treaties, Agreements, and Conventions, 1775-1979* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999)

⁸⁰ Rusty Conroy, "Defends Indian Rights: NASC Advances Struggle," *Guardian*, April 7, 1976; "Threats to the Peaceful Observance of the Bicentennial. Hearing before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Fourth Congress, Second Session, June 18, 1976." U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1976. Online. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Threats_to_the_peaceful_observance_of_the_bicentennial.djvu/1 . 91-93; "Discussion Paper – NASC [Native American Solidarity Committee] as a Non-Indian Solidarity Organization" Underground Newspaper Collection.

⁸¹ For more on the relations between the Red Power movement and the counterculture's various groups, see Sherry L. Smith, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

beyond the Germanic countries of Central Europe,⁸² it was a daunting task to keep the struggle from turning into a movement of European Indian *reformers* instead of an alliance for Indian sovereignty rights. Glenn Penny has investigated how the gradual arrival of Native American voices changed the discourse of Indian authenticity in Germany.⁸³ Another field in which this made a difference was the European interest in American Indian spirituality. Lakota medicine man Archie Fire Lane Deer⁸⁴ spent much of the 1980s touring Europe, and he visited East Germany in 1983 and 1985, educating audiences about Native American approaches to religion and society. In his lectures, workshops and sweat lodge ceremonies, Lane Deer encouraged and successfully persuaded some East German enthusiasts to look for *local* spiritual traditions instead of trying to ‘play Indian.’⁸⁵ In other instances, the European propensity to ‘go Native’ elicited more forceful interventions from North American Indians. When European hobbyists wanted to re-enact the Sioux sun dance outside Munich in the mid-1980s, AIM-affiliated Native medicine men forced them to call off the event. In his later teachings, Lane Deer used this incident as an argument for not only separate but equal spiritual practices, but also for discontinuing European involvement in the Indian sovereignty movement.⁸⁶

Strange Bedfellows: Red Alliances in the United Nations

Parallel to developing transatlantic ties to groups under Eastern European Marxist régimes, American Indian sovereignty activists also gained entry into the United Nations, where they cooperated with Nonaligned and Marxist countries and national liberation movements. After repeated petitions and delegations to the UN in the early 1970s, the June 1974 First International Indian Treaty Council conference adopted a program of transnational diplomacy for sovereignty rights, including a sustained engagement with the United Nations.⁸⁷ In that same month, the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) initiated the process of gaining status in the UN Economic and Social Council.⁸⁸ In May

⁸² For more on the fluidity characteristic of Germanic solidarity groups, see Bernd C. Peyer, “Who is Afraid of AIM?” In Christian F. Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe*, 552-553.

⁸³ See Glen Penny, “Elusive Authenticity,” 798-818.

⁸⁴ Archie Fire Lane Deer was the son of John Fire Lane Deer, with whom Richard Erdoes had co-authored the book *Lane Deer, Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972).

⁸⁵ Von Borries and Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys*, 82-84, 97.

⁸⁶ “Ceremony & Sundance, Europe, Do's & Don'ts; Beer & Alcohol, etc., Europe?” Undated audio recording by Richard Erdoes of Archie Fire Lane Deer. Richard Erdoes Papers. Peyer likewise refers to the same or possibly another similar instance at the 1983 “1st European Medicine Wheel Gathering and Spiritual Camp” in the Black Forest. Bernd C. Peyer, “Who is Afraid of AIM?” In Christian F. Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe*, 560.

⁸⁷ “Declaration of Continuing Independence by the First International Indian Treaty Council at Standing Rock Indian Country June 1974.” Roger A. Finzel American Indian Movement Papers. Also at <https://www.iitc.org/about-iitc/the-declaration-of-continuing-independence-june-1974/>. Accessed November 5, 2018.

⁸⁸ International Indian Treaty Council application for NGO consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). June 21, 1974. In Consultative Arrangements and Relations with the International Indian Treaty Council- OR 340 (958), Pt. 1. S-0446-0264-0003, UN. Registry

1977, the UN body finally granted the Treaty Council Category II non-governmental organization observer status.⁸⁹ In September of that year, the radical sovereignty movement held its breakthrough Non-Governmental Organizations International Conference on Discrimination against the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas in Geneva, Switzerland, under the aegis of the United Nations. Throughout the rest of the Cold War, the radical Indian sovereignty movement asserted their agenda in the sessions of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) in Geneva, Switzerland. In their interventions for Native rights, Indian activists leveraged their alliances with Nonaligned and Marxist countries.

The assertion of Native sovereignty as human rights was the result of not only a series of constraints and choices,⁹⁰ but it also coincided with President Jimmy Carter's decision to make human rights an important element of U.S. foreign policy.⁹¹ Now the Indian sovereignty movement embarked on a transnational campaign to shine a light on the violations and denial of rights to Native communities by the very government which touted its commitment to human rights everywhere in the world. According to Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, the Socialist Second World's propensity to support Third World initiatives in the UN prompted Indian activists to build alliances with Third World countries, as well as their more radical national liberation organizations such as the African National Congress, the Pan-African Congress, the Southwest Africa Peoples Organization, and the Palestine Liberation Organization.⁹²

The unspoken agreement between radical sovereignty activists like Dunbar-Ortiz and Marxist régimes and organizations in the UN human rights body seems to have been that while the Indian representatives defended the revolutionary régimes against U.S. and other Western criticism, the Marxist and Nonaligned representatives would support American Indian initiatives and criticize the indigenous rights record of the U.S. government. This was especially true in the case of Leonard Peltier, who had been serving consecutive life sentences since 1977 for the shooting of two FBI agents. From 1978, the IITC raised Peltier's and other political detainee cases in the Commission's

Section, Archive Series-Box S-0446-0264, Registry Archive Group - Organizational (OR). United Nations Archives, New York City.

⁸⁹ Letter from Virginia Saurwein of the UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations to Jimmie Durham of the International Indian Treaty Council, May 18, 1977. In *ibid*.

⁹⁰ While in the early and mid-1970s there was a hope among Indian activists that they could get the United Nations to place Indian reservation on a track to eventual decolonization through the Decolonization Committee, both the precedents by African Americans and the responses of the United Nations channeled Native efforts into categorizing sovereignty rights as human rights. For more on this, see György Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 141-168.

⁹¹ For more, see President Jimmy Carter's "First Inaugural Address." January 20, 1977. Online at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1194> Accessed November 5, 2018; also "Human Rights and Foreign Policy." Jimmy Carter's commencement speech at Notre Dame University, June 1977. Online at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=727> Accessed November 5, 2018.

⁹² Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 44-46, 232

annual meetings, and representatives from Cuba, the U.S.S.R., Syria, or Afghanistan would blast the U.S. for its poor record of human rights for blacks, Latinos, and Indians.⁹³

On at least some occasions, such a tactical alliance yielded some successes. At the UNCHR's 1981 session, the Treaty Council tried to refute U.S. charges about a "shipment of Communist arms to El Salvador leftists," who included indigenous groups. At the same time, the Treaty Council called for more pressure on Chile because of the indigenous land rights abuses of its rightist government. Next the Treaty Council and the Syrian Arab Republic both expressed concern about the treatment of Leonard Peltier, who they considered a political prisoner of the U.S. Syria stated that it was willing to raise the issue in the UN General Assembly. Whether as a result of their intervention or a coincidence, Peltier's solitary confinement was rescinded a few days after the session.⁹⁴

The commitment of Indian activists to this alliance with Marxist régimes for indigenous rights could be seen as either admirably persistent or foolhardy. As late as in 1989, Tony Gonzales of the International Indian Treaty Council not only pursued the case of Peltier, but also defended Cuba's human rights record on the floor of the UN Commission on Human Rights. In return, the representative of Cuba spoke out on behalf of American Indians, and urged a UN investigation of human rights in the United States.⁹⁵ This dynamic was part of the swashbuckling 'resolution wars' between the U.S. and Cuba, neither of which usually managed to pass a motion to have the other investigated.⁹⁶ To the chagrin of the U.S. and its allies, Indian sovereignty activists and Marxist representatives built and maintained a transcontinental 'red' human rights alliance in the late Cold War.

⁹³ UNCHR session February 21, March 7, 8, 1978. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1978-9, E/CN.4/SR.1441-1480. UNCHR session March 13 10 AM, 3 PM, 1979. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1979-80, E/CN.4/SR.1481-1522. UNCHR session March 11, 12 10 AM, 3 PM, 1985. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1985, E/CN.4/1985/SR 46 – 58. UNCHR session February 19, 27, 1990. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1990, E/CN.4/1990/SR.20-40. United Nations Library, Palace of the Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹⁴ "United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Thirty-seventh session)," *Oyate Wicaho* February-May 1981, 6. Underground Newspaper Collection. Also "Written statements" E/CN.4/NGO/299 February 4, 1981; E/CN.4/NGO/311 February 17, 1981; E/CN.4/NGO/319 March 2, 1981, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, Thirty-seventh session, agenda item 13. United Nations Library.

⁹⁵ UNCHR session February 10, 1989. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1989-90, E/CN.4/1989/SR. 1-20. UNCHR session February 21, March 1, 1989. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1989-90, E/CN.4/1989/SR.21- 36. UNCHR session March 6, 7, 1989. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1989-90, E/CN.4/1989/SR.50-57. United Nations Library.

⁹⁶ See L.26 draft resolution on human rights in Cuba by the US, and L.35 draft resolution on human rights in U.S. by Cuba. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1985-88, E/CN.4/1988/L.12-104. Also UNCHR session March 10, 1988. Bound volume "United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 1988, E/CN.4/1988/SR. 42-57. United Nations Library.

The Breakup: Race against Revolution in Nicaragua

The ultimate test of the mutual commitment to the alliance between the Native American sovereignty struggle and Marxist revolutionary movements came with their involvement in Nicaragua in the 1980s. After the Sandinista National Liberation Front successfully overthrew the military dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979, the former rebels embarked on a project of Marxist revolutionary nation building. The Indian communities of Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, who had largely stayed away from the power struggle, now came under pressure to submit to Sandinista policies made without their assent. The Reagan Administration and its anti-Communist allies opposed the Sandinista régime, and they openly and covertly worked to overthrow it through much of the 1980s. Thus the rights of the indigenous Sumu, Rama and Miskito Indians of Nicaragua became a rallying point of the radical Indian sovereignty movement even as the issue was being deployed by the U.S. government in its anti-Communist foreign policy.

U.S. Indian activists seem to have felt compelled to choose between an anti-Communist pro-indigenous stance, and a pro-Marxist position that subordinated Native rights to the revolutionary project. By 1980, AIM leader Russell Means had dismissed Marxism as a political partner for being just another European ideology that reproduced the colonialist status quo for indigenous people even as it aimed to reorder society.⁹⁷

Revolutionary Marxism is committed to even further perpetuation and perfection of the very industrial process which is destroying us all. It is offering only to "redistribute" the results, the money maybe, of this industrialization to a wider section of the population. It offers to take wealth from the capitalist and pass it around, but in order to do so, Marxism must maintain the industrial system. Once again, the power relations within European society will have to be altered, but once again the effects upon American Indian peoples here and non-Europeans elsewhere will remain the same.

I do not believe that capitalism itself is really responsible for the situation in which we have been declared a national sacrifice. No, it is the European tradition; European culture itself is responsible. Marxism is just the latest continuation of this tradition, not a solution to it. To ally with Marxism is to ally with the very same forces which declare us an acceptable "cost."⁹⁸

On the other hand, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz maintained that it was possible to reconcile indigenous rights with the Marxist nation building project through a power sharing that respected human rights and even autonomy.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ For more, see Means' speech "For America to Live, Europe must Die" at the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, South Dakota, July 1980. In Means with Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 545-554.

⁹⁸ Ward Churchill, ed. *Marxism and Native Americans* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 26, 28. The text of this article by Russell Means titled "The Same Old Song" is largely identical with his "For America to Live, Europe Must Die", a speech claimed to have been delivered at the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, South Dakota, July 1980, published in Means with Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 545-554.

⁹⁹ For more about this, see Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas: Human Rights and Self-Determination* (London: Zed Books, 1984).

I cared about the survival of the Sandinista revolution, but cared equally, if not more, for the liberation and self-determination of the Indigenous peoples. I knew that an alliance with United States Contra counterinsurgency would backfire on any group that entered into it. I also believed that the Sandinistas could transform themselves into leaders in Latin America, promoting the self-determination of the native peoples. Without US intervention, I think they would have achieved the goal they set for themselves in 1981.¹⁰⁰

Along with others, both activists engaged with the issue of Nicaragua: in the early to mid-1980s Means visited the region three times,¹⁰¹ while Dunbar-Ortiz spent much of the decade in Nicaragua as an activist, observer, and a shuttle diplomat trying to resolve conflicts.¹⁰²

As the Miskitos took opposing sides on the ground, so fractured the Indian sovereignty movement on the issue. Early on, the American Indian Movement and the International Indian Treaty Council, dominated by Russell and his brother Bill Means, supported the Sandinista government and praised its “Literacy Crusade,” which they saw as aiming at instilling national unity, raising revolutionary consciousness, and giving agency back to the indigenous and other Nicaraguans.¹⁰³ However, as the tensions mounted between the Sandinistas and the coastal Indians, and counterrevolutionary forces started to mobilize in the Nicaragua-Honduras border region, these U.S. Native organizations increasingly feared a U.S. intervention.¹⁰⁴ In late 1981 or early 1982, AIM and the IITC were invited by the Nicaraguan government to undertake their first fact finding mission to Nicaragua. They found that

[T]he former National Guardsmen of Somoza were operating out of Honduras trying to get the Miskitos to rise up against the new government of Nicaragua. They were attacking Indian villages dressed up as Sandinistas, and were kidnapping people and burning villages, trying to create a climate of fear and terror in the area, forcing the Indians to leave Nicaragua and join the counter-revolutionaries in Honduras. It is widely suspected that the CIA is behind much of the trouble.¹⁰⁵

AIM and the IITC noted that under the leadership of Steadman Fagoth, some Miskitos had been convinced to cross into Honduras and train to fight against the Sandinistas¹⁰⁶ in what came to be called the Contra forces. Other Miskitos stayed either neutral or loyal to the Sandinista régime, and these were the Indians who AIM and the

¹⁰⁰ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 12.

¹⁰¹ Means with Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 461, 463, 466.

¹⁰² Dunbar Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 12.

¹⁰³ “International Indian Treaty Council Report,” *Oyate Wicaho* Nov 1980, 6-8; “Nicaragua’s Literacy Crusade: A Revolutionary Priority,” *Oyate Wicaho* June-Aug 1981, 5; “Liberated Indian Country: Free Nicaragua,” *Treaty Council News* July 1981, 3. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹⁰⁴ “Liberated Indian Country: Free Nicaragua,” *Treaty Council News* July 1981, 3. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹⁰⁵ “AIM and Treaty Council Visit Nicaragua,” *Oyate Wicaho* January-March 1982, 6. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

IITC met and chose to believe on this and subsequent visits. In repeated press statements, the IITC's Bill Means and Dunbar-Ortiz expressed outrage over the U.S.-orchestrated terror and guerrilla raids, and affirmed their faith in the Sandinista government's ability to satisfactorily include the Nicaraguan indigenous in the process of revolutionary nation building.¹⁰⁷

AIM leader Russell Means, on the other hand, attempted to leverage his organization's support for the Sandinista government for the recognition of U.S. Indian sovereignty rights. In March 1982, he pressed Nicaraguan Commandante Jaime Wheelock to endorse the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty as an international agreement in return for the IITC's continuing support of the Sandinista régime.¹⁰⁸ After Wheelock asked for time to consider the deal, Means gave an interview to the North American sovereignty flagship newspaper *Akwesasne Notes* in which he denounced Nicaragua's record of indigenous rights: "I feel they are Marxists; and I feel that Marxists are the most racist people on earth."¹⁰⁹ Publicly, Dunbar-Ortiz attempted to patch up the rift by pointing out that Means spoke only for himself, not on behalf of the IITC and reiterating the organization's official position.¹¹⁰ Privately, she thought Means was after celebrity status.¹¹¹ After his own fact finding trip to the region, Means publicly pledged to recruit North American Indians for an armed struggle against the Sandinistas, which positively outraged AIM, the U.S. left, and some of the general public.¹¹²

Even as the IITC continued to associate and conference with the pro-Sandinista indigenous of Nicaragua,¹¹³ the anti-Sandinista Miskito sought out U.S. Indian organizations to build pro-indigenous anti-Marxist alliances. Indian rebel commander Brooklyn Rivera was favorably received by the more conservative National Congress of the American Indians,¹¹⁴ while Miskito exile Armstrong Wiggins found a home at the

¹⁰⁷ "Clarification of Treaty Council Position on the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua," *Oyate Wicaho* May-August 1982, 8-9. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹⁰⁸ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 129, 135-136; Means with Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 459-460.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 137; "An Interview with Russell Means" *Akwesasne Notes* Vol. 14, no. 3 (early summer 1982), 23. Underground Newspaper Collection. Also the same at the American Indian Digital History Project. Online. <http://www.aidhp.com/files/original/38dc40f8473de5379a79eb2713d060da.pdf>. Accessed September 29, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "To the Editors of Akwesasne Notes," July 16, 1982, *Oyate Wicaho* May-August 1982, 9. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹¹¹ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 137.

¹¹² Means with Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 463, 466; "Leaders Decry Proposal to Have US Indians Fight Sandinistas," *The Daily Californian* April 3, 1985; AIM Governing Council press release April 4, 1985. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council; also in Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 247.

¹¹³ For example, the International Indian Treaty Council invited and hosted pro-Sandinista Miskito at a conference in Arizona. "Clarification of Treaty Council Position on the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua," *Oyate Wicaho* May-Aug 1982 8-9. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹¹⁴ "NCAI President Enters into an International Agreement with General Commander Brooklyn Rivera, of MISURATA, Nicaragua" Aug 15, 1983. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council.

Washington, D.C.-based Indian Law Resource Center (ILRC), a former ally of the IITC.¹¹⁵ The IITC publicized that ‘their’ Miskito disputed the right of these pro-Sandinista Indians to represent the indigenous of Nicaragua.¹¹⁶ In one of his later responses, Wiggins of the ILRC castigated Bill Means of the IITC for his organization’s public statements on Nicaragua.¹¹⁷ Soon, however, even the IITC fractured when Means decided to expel fellow activist and representative to the UN Glenn Morris from the organization over his activities regarding Nicaragua. In return, Morris accused Means of selling out indigenous rights for the sake of political expediency – a continued alliance with the Marxist Sandinistas.¹¹⁸ Western European indigenous rights advocacy organizations like the British Survival International and Cultural Survival likewise took an anti-Sandinista position.¹¹⁹

The falling out over Nicaragua spilled over from the Indian sovereignty movement into the U.S. public sphere and onto the world stage. Dated November 30, 1985, veteran sovereignty activist Hank Adams circulated a long letter addressed to President Ronald Reagan and copied to half the U.S. government, Indian organizations and the media, in which he publicly condemned the pro-Sandinista group in AIM.¹²⁰ At the sessions of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the Nicaraguan representative and the IITC were now pitted against the U.S. government and the ILRC in a struggle over the meaning of the Nicaraguan revolution for indigenous human rights.¹²¹ In a twist that gives yet another meaning to the word *red*, some prominent Indian leaders like Hank Adams now questioned the very Indianness of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, who was still committed to a Native-Marxist alliance.¹²² Thus now it was not only brother against brother and sister – Miskito against Miskito, Hank Adams and Russell Means against Bill Means and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. It was sovereignty organization against sovereignty organization - AIM against itself, the IITC against the Indian Law Resource Center and the National Congress of the American Indians. Finally, it was ‘red’ nation against ‘red’ nation: the IITC against the Miskito Contras, and AIM and the ILRC against the Nicaraguan Marxist government. The alliance between Indian sovereignty activists

¹¹⁵ Letter from Armstrong Wiggins of the Indian Law Resource Center to William Means of the International Indian Treaty Council, June 25, 1984. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council. Also see Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 113.

¹¹⁶ “Clarification of Treaty Council Position on the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua,” *Oyate Wicaho* May-Aug 1982, 8-9. Underground Newspaper Collection.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Armstrong Wiggins of the Indian Law Resource Center to William Means of the International Indian Treaty Council, June 25, 1984. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council. Also see Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 113.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Glenn Morris of Colorado AIM to Bill Means and Bill Wahpepah of the International Indian Treaty Council, Oct. 29, 1986. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council.

¹¹⁹ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 257.

¹²⁰ Letter from Hank Adams of the Survival of the American Indians Association to President Ronald Reagan, November 30, 1985. Records of the International Indian Treaty Council. Also see Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 258-259.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 258, 259

and Marxist movements fractured along the lines of race against revolution.¹²³ Even as the Reagan Administration's Iran-Contra arms sales unraveled in a 1986 public scandal,¹²⁴ inter- and intra-Indian power struggles and recriminations continued for much of the rest of the 1980s.

Conclusion

The era of such heady but tenuous alliances came to an end in 1990, when the Sandinistas were unseated by an opposition coalition in the Nicaraguan elections. That same year, Eastern European Communist régimes crumbled and fell or transitioned to other models of government. The subsequent domestic and geopolitical transformations dramatically reduced the potential allies for the Native American sovereignty movement that had managed to bend U.S. federal Indian policy back towards strengthening and safeguarding Native American rights, even if full independence was foreclosed for Indian Country.

This article reconstructed a history of how Native American and Marxist solidarity activists and governments attempted to reconfigure the geography of American Indian sovereignty into a fully independent Native America that, albeit briefly, was in alliance with revolutionary Marxism and its own 'red' nations around the globe. It has argued that the Native-Marxist alliance in the Eastern Bloc was enabled by older European continental cultural fantasies about Indians, and the appropriation of some Marxist governments of the imaginary of American Indians for anti-imperialism and anti-U.S. propaganda. I have demonstrated that Native American radical sovereignty activists exercised remarkable agency in their transnational diplomacy, traveling and working to form solidarity groups, to educate audiences, and to build alliances with people living under Marxist governments. However, such alliances could not be maintained for long due to the difficulty of reconciling U.S. patriotic anti-Communism, indigenous rights, and the Marxist revolutionary project. This story of the alliances between Marxists and American Indian sovereignty activists reinscribes Native American agency and their struggle for the decolonization of 'Indian Country' in the complex geopolitics of the Cold War.

¹²³ This formulation was inspired by the title of Penny von Eschen's *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹²⁴ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*, 268.